

S.S. Rushville Victory Ship

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During World War II, Rushville, Illinois had the honor of having a ship named after it. This was quite an honor at that time, because there were only fifty “Victory Ships” named after cities throughout the United States. Only two cities in Illinois were chosen. The other city was Blue Island, near Chicago. According to the Maritime Commission, the 534 Victory ships were built to replace the Liberty Ships. They were constructed to be much larger, faster and more structurally sound for attacks against enemy attacks. They were designed as cargo vessels, but were used to transport troops, ammunition, and supplies.

After all towns of small or medium population in the state, the Maritime Commission selected Rushville because of its part in the war effort, its historical background, and it was regarded as an All-American community. Due to the support of the Scripps family, the community gained national recognition as a recreational center when, in 1921, the Scripps homestead farm was donated to the city by E. W. Scripps. He was the founder of the Scripps-Howard newspaper syndicate. The Scripps family had first settled in Rushville in 1844.

The christening of the Rushville Victory Ship took place at the Bethlehem-Fairfield Shipyards in Baltimore, Maryland on April 24, 1945. The Schuyler Community Club voted for Betty Dill Miles Stetson to attend as a representative for Rushville. She was a student at Illinois College. She was chosen because she had a brother and husband

overseas at the time. The club's commitment was to equip the ship with a modern library and to raise money for Stetson's expenses. She was very proud and excited to represent Rushville at the christening.

Others attending the launching included many residents and former residents of Rushville. A Rushville native, Jesse Street, who was enlisted in the Navy and stationed in that area, was chosen to press the button to launch the ship. He was honored and felt that this helped to promote Rushville, Illinois's recognition.

There were only two Rushville natives that had the opportunity to ride the ship. They were Harold Davis and William Bartlow. They were in France waiting to come home. The first ship sent to bring them home was the Lehigh Victory Ship. The S. S. Rushville Victory Ship sailed in a day later. Both of them bragged that it would have been a great honor to ride home aboard the ship named after their home town. The next thing they knew their group was assigned to ride home aboard the Rushville Victory Ship. They both felt proud as they pulled out of LeHavre, France, on Christmas Eve 1945. Both Davis and Bartlow remember the terrible storms and rough water, and nearly everyone on board suffering with sea sickness. There was much discussion aboard the ship as to whether the ship was named after a city in Illinois or Indiana. This argument was resolved by a plaque aboard the ship and an article in the ship's newsletter, "Atlantic Express," confirming that it was named after a city in Illinois.

There is conflicting evidence about what happened to the ship after the war. Some thought it had been scrapped and others thought it was sold to Denmark. Neither the Naval Historical Foundation nor the United States National Archives could find any information in their records as to what happened to the Rushville Victory Ship.

Having a victory ship named after their hometown gave the citizens of Rushville a great sense of pride. It was a great honor in Rushville's contribution to the war efforts during World War II. [From The Big Rush," *Atlantic Express*, (Dec. 26,1945); student historian's interview with Harold E. Davis, (Dec. 21,2002); "50th 'Small-Town' Victory Launching," *Baltimore Sun*, (Apr. 25,1945); "First Rushville G. I.'s Aboard Hometown Boat," *Atlantic Express*, (Dec. 27,1945); "Rushville Victory Ship Launched April 24th at Baltimore, Maryland." *Rushville Times*, (May 3, 1945); *Schuyler County Illinois History*, (1985); Shipyards and Suppliers for the United States Maritime Commission During World War II, "Ships Built Under Maritime Commission Contracts by Shipyard," www.usmm.nct/shipbuild.html, (Dec. 15, 2002); S. S. Rushville Victory Ship Display, Schuyler County Jail Museum, Rushville, Illinois; "S. S. Rushville Victory Was Christened in Fine Manner," *Rushville Times*, (May 3, 1945).]